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Subject: USS Lead - Press

East Chicago press clips
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<https://www.indystar.com/story/news/2017/10/16/lead-my-bones-living-contaminated-life-east-chicago/754622001/>

'Lead in my bones': Living a contaminated life in East Chicago
 Emily Hopkins, IndyStar Oct. 16, 2017

"Are you concerned about your water?"

It's not a question that 13- and 14-year-old kids would typically ponder. But when Denise Abdul-Rahman asks the question to a group of middle school students, hands shoot up.

And for good reason. This isn't just any school in just any city. It's the Urban Enterprise Academy in East Chicago — a school located across the street from an EPA Superfund site.

Abdul-Rahman, the Environmental Justice Chair of the Indiana NAACP, asks the question as part of the inaugural "Our Youth Scientists" training program, organized by the Indiana NAACP. The idea was spurred by frustration about what the Indiana NAACP calls mismanagement of the local lead contamination. Abdul-Rahman says it will be an ongoing initiative to train children located in contaminated areas to test their air, soil and water for lead.

"It's extremely important that these youth learn the legacy of the lead in the community that they live in," Abdul-Rahman said. "They have the right to feel safe, and that we're giving them tools to help them to know their own living space and environment."

America's industrial city

East Chicago's industrial legacy began at the turn of the 20th century, when Inland Steel built a plant in the city's harbor. It was one of many companies to take advantage of the city's proximity to Lake Michigan and the Calumet River, and of the railroads that still dissect the city.

U.S. Smelter and Lead Refinery, Inc. was one of those companies, and for nearly 80 years, it operated on the land that now makes up the 79-acre USS Lead Superfund Site.

In that time, the company performed a variety of industrial processing tasks. In particular, it operated as a lead smelter. In the early days, the plant processed ore, but in the 1970s, it began recovering lead from old automobile batteries and scrap metal. Waste from the plant's operation was dealt with in a variety of ways. Solid waste was pushed once a year into nearby wetlands, and for at least a decade, USS Lead discharged furnace cooling water and storm water runoff into the Great Calumet River, dumping amounts of lead, cadmium, copper, arsenic and zinc that exceeded what was permitted.

In the meantime, construction of the nearby West Calumet Housing Complex was completed in the early 1970s. And although state and federal agencies were aware of high levels of heavy metals in the area — and despite the fact that it had been nominated for the Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List once before, in 1992 — it wasn't until 2009 that it was finally added to the NPL and designated a Superfund site.

"I didn't know we lived on top of a lead refinery," says Akeeshea Daniels. She is one of the residents who had to relocate after East Chicago's mayor ordered the evacuation of the complex last year. Test results showed a lead level of 32,000 parts per million inside her home. The EPA considers anything above 700 ppm to be dangerous.

Health problems for Daniels started to surface in the late 2000s. Her sons were experiencing repeated and unrelenting cases of strep throat, to the point that it escalated to scarlet fever. (Lead and other contaminants have been shown to affect immune functions.) Attributing some of the issues to mold in her bathtub, she eventually got the tub replaced. That's when she found out that there was no barrier between the tub and the dirt below.

"The same contaminated soil that was outside," Daniels says. "My tub was sitting in dirt."

Daniels lived in that home for about a decade before the mayor ordered the evacuation. In that time, two of her sons, now 13 and 19, racked up nearly 1,000 pages of medical records. Her youngest son, Xavier, was less than a month old when Daniels moved to the West Calumet Housing Complex. He suffers from asthma, allergies and ADHD, which Daniels attributes to the contamination of their unit.

Daniels, 41, has had more than her fair share of health problems, as well. Three years ago, she had surgery to have her tonsils out — an unusual procedure for someone in their late 30s. She suffers from rheumatoid arthritis. And she has lead in her bones.

From lead testing to STEM

At Urban Enterprise, Naomi Casares is one of the students learning how to test her environment for lead. She signed a letter earlier this year urging President Donald Trump not to cut funding for STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programming. She was excited to get some hands-on experience with testing. She lives on Zone 2 of the Superfund site, and was happy to say that her tests came back negative.

"So it's kinds of cool to know that I'm safe," Casares said. "Zone 2 is where a lot of lead is."

Daniels also attended this past week's "Our Youth Scientists" training program with her youngest son, a student at Urban Enterprise Academy. A lanky 13-year-old who is tall for his age, Xavier sat with his classmates, learning to test for lead in the air.

"I'm glad they're doing something that will make him get more active with his classmates," Daniels said.

That was also on the mind of Dee Etta Wright, principal of Joseph L. Block Middle School, where training also took place earlier that morning.

"I think this is very important because 49 percent of our kids are African-American, 49 percent are Hispanic," Wright said. "And as we all know, those minorities are underrepresented in some of the science fields, so we're hoping that this will spark interest in our students to maybe become interested in science careers."

Wright's school is located about 2 miles northeast of the Superfund site. She says that her students felt the impact of the closure of the West Calumet Housing Complex. Some of the kids had been attending Block Middle School when the complex was evacuated.

"Most of the kids who were living in the housing complex, they either relocated to Hammond, Merrillville or Gary," she said. A few students stayed in the school, "but not many. We lost those kids."

The soil, water and dust samples tested at the training were supplied by the students themselves. Of the samples tested, most did not show any lead contamination, but two tested in the 300-500 ppm range — meaning food grown in that soil would be unfit to eat.

Worse, at least one sample tested above 700 ppm, which makes the soil unfit to play in. Other samples were later taken back to Indiana State University, which is providing free testing.

Just a few blocks away from the schools, in what is called Zone 2 of the Superfund site, a handful of yards sit cordoned off with yellow plastic fencing. Inside, where bright green lawns once sat lie pits dug 2 feet deep by EPA contractors. They've been working yard by yard to remove the contaminated dirt and replace it with new soil. They're hoping to get the excavations done before frost sets in and the ground hardens.

State Sen. Lonnie Randolph, D-East Chicago, who joined the kids for the morning training, grew up in the area and says this issue hits close to home, literally. Randolph said he played in Zone 1, lived in Zone 2 and his parents lived in Zone 3.

"The main thing is to get some recognition," Randolph said, "make people aware of what's going on so we can get some help."

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-east-chicago-uss-lead-agreement-st-1013-20171013-story.html>

EPA begins study of contamination at former East Chicago factory site
Craig Lyons, Post Tribune Oct. 13, 2017

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has tasked a former East Chicago company with exploring potential contamination at the Superfund site adjacent to the Calumet neighborhood.

The EPA reached an administrative agreement in September, which became effective Oct. 4, with U.S.S. Lead, whose name was used to designate the area a Superfund site, to conduct groundwater and soil testing to explore potential contamination that remains at the former industrial site along Kennedy Avenue. The company will do both a remedial investigation to look at potential contamination, according to EPA documents, and a feasibility study that details ways to contain any problems.

"Residual contamination from lead and other metals may remain in soil, wetlands and other areas within the former U.S.S. Lead facility that may result in unacceptable exposure of contaminants to human and ecological receptors," the EPA said in the agreement. The agreement noted that possible off-site groundwater contamination is coming from the facility.

The EPA is holding a community forum at 10 a.m. Saturday at the old Carrie Gosch School, 455 E. 148th St., in the Superfund site, to listen to concerns from community members.

Debbie Chizewer, of Northwestern University Pritzker Law's Environmental Advocacy Clinic who is working with the East Chicago Calumet Coalition, said she's glad the EPA heard the community's concern about the groundwater and reached an agreement to explore the issue.

But because the EPA is letting the company take the lead on the studies, Chizewer said residents will keep a close eye on the process to make sure it's done thoroughly.

"I think the residents are really concerned about the groundwater," Chizewer said.

The EPA said it prefers to have potentially responsible parties perform work so its own resources can go toward projects that don't have a company or entity being held liable for contamination. The EPA said in an email it will oversee and monitor the work.

Once the company completes the two studies, the EPA will create a proposed remediation plan, before collecting public feedback and issuing a record of decision.

U.S.S. Lead operated its East Chicago facility from 1906 to 1985, according to the EPA, and in 1996 constructed a corrective action management unit where contaminated material from the then-shuttered company was contained to prevent further contamination of the surrounding area. The EPA said the company also built barriers to limit other contaminant exposure.

In 2009, the U.S.S. Lead site was listed on the national priorities list, according to EPA documents, and divided into two operable units.

The first unit includes the residential areas of the Calumet neighborhood. The EPA conducted a remedial investigation of the neighborhood, according to documents, and in 2012 created a record of decision that detailed the cleanup plans for that portion of the site.

The second unit includes the company's former facility, which is south of the Calumet neighborhood.

The cleanup plan for zones 1 and 3 were included in a 2014 consent decree, which The U.S. District Court for Northern Indiana approved, between the EPA, Department of Justice, state of Indiana, the Atlantic Richfield Co. and E.I. du Pont De Nemours regarding the cleanup of the U.S. Smelter and Lead Refinery site.

Based on the agreement, the two companies would cover roughly \$26 million in cleanup costs, according to the EPA.

The plan did not include zone 2, which runs from 151st to Chicago Avenue and Huish to McCook Avenue.

The EPA in March announced another \$16 million had been secured from the responsible parties to bolster cleanup in the Superfund site, specifically the area not included in the previous consent decree.

The EPA first opted to start cleanup in the residential portion of the Superfund site because it was the "most likely exposure pathway for residents," according to a statement from the EPA, and the risk associated with the groundwater and contaminants at the former factory is much lower.

"The former U.S.S. Lead facility is no longer in operation, and surface contamination there has already largely been addressed," the EPA said. "Similarly, potable water in the residential neighborhood is provided by the City of East Chicago, it does not come from groundwater well."

<http://gary411news.com/News-Detail.aspx?typeID=1&newsID=44404>

NAACP trains East Chicago residents to do their own lead testing

Contributed By: The 411 News

Block Middle School is first stop in Community Science Project

The devastating effects of lead contamination are borne mostly by the young. East Chicago's West Calumet Housing Development is now empty; its residents evacuated because of toxic soils. Gone are the 400 families who lived there a year ago.

Soon, demolition crews will come to tear down the homes that sat on soil so contaminated with lead and arsenic that the city determined the property was unfit for habitation. Lead is known to slow and severely hamper brain development in the fetuses of pregnant woman and in children under 6.

Some of those gone were students at Joseph L. Block Middle School last year.

The school was the site Tuesday morning as the NAACP kicked off its Community Science Project, six days of community training and learning sponsored by the civil rights organization's Environmental and Climate Justice Program.

Block school is participating in the NAACP's Our Community Scientists initiative to teach students how to conducts tests of water, soil, and air themselves. Later Tuesday, the project traveled to East Chicago's Urban Enterprise Academy, the second stop on the kickoff tour.

Indiana State University, a partner with the NAACP, designed the methods and provided kits that students used to collect samples in and around their homes. ISU scientists will analyze results of the students' research.

Another partner, the Union of Concerned Scientists' J.C. Kibbey said one lesson of the project's training should be clear, "Science is not something that sits on the shelf or in a book; it's something you use every day."

On the last day of the project, at 10 a.m. Saturday, October 14, the partners will distribute free testing kits to the community at First Baptist Church, 4911 McCook Avenue.

<https://chicagocrusader.com/students-taught-lead-testing-after-federal-budget-cuts/>

Students taught lead testing after Federal Budget cuts

By Patrick Forrest, Gary Crusader October 12, 2017

The NAACP East Chicago led a group of students in East Chicago through the processes of testing water, air and soil for lead. The limited number of selected students were given self-test kits and led through the process by volunteers from Indiana State University, NAACP and science teacher Mitchell Cole.

“It was nice to see the students grasping this concept and how it affects them in their day-to-day lives,” Cole said. “We couldn’t get everyone, but the students we had here definitely had an experience I hope they take with them and use to help others.”

Last year, East Chicago, Indiana garnered national attention when West Calumet housing complex was ordered evacuated due to toxic levels of lead.

In partnership with Indiana State University, students were shown how to measure air and water quality to determine if they are safe to breathe and drink, respectively.

“It’s cool to know that as students we can do things to make changes to our environment,” said Naomi Caseras, an 8th grader at East Chicago Urban Enterprise Academy. “It does not always have to be adults, we can find little things that make big changes.”

When the students came together, they were able to complete tests of personally gathered samples for lead contaminants. The lessons would make it easier to call attention to issues they may come across in the future.

“Throughout the weekend, we gathered samples of air, water and soil,” Caseras said. “I only got to test my air sample and it was lead-free. I don’t think anyone had any for the air.”

In a statement, the NAACP stated, “The Trump administration defunded EPA programs that test air and water quality in places like East Chicago. The agency also recently moved the Office of Environmental Justice internally to be closer and under the control of EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt; a move advocates say is an attempt to politicize” the office’s work.

“In these times where polluted communities are being abandoned by a government that is institutionalized stewardship of corporate interest over public health,” Jacqui Patterson, director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program. “This community science project is a critical stop-gap measure.”

The community effort continues on Oct. 13 at Friendship Baptist Church, 4911 McCook Ave., where a community discussion will be held on the displacement and how political ignorance has shaped their predicament. Also, on Oct. 14 community members will be taught how to test air, water and soil for lead at First Baptist Church.

<https://www.pressreader.com/usa/chicago-tribune/20171015/281724089779048>

Article in Post Tribune Print: U.S.S. Lead to search its site for pollution